

NEWS RELEASE from

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lipinski Introduces D.C. School Choice Legislation

Congressman Bill Lipinski released the following statement today regarding his bill, the District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 2003.

“Today, I am proud to join Congressman Jeff Flake in introducing legislation that would expand choices for Washington D.C. students who are stuck in failing schools. The District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 2003 would provide grade school opportunity scholarships to District of Columbia residents whose family incomes are below 185 percent of the poverty level. The scholarships could be used for tuition costs at a public or private school in D.C. and adjacent counties in Maryland and Virginia. The bill would also make Enhanced Achievement Scholarships available for tutoring assistance.

The need for these scholarships is clear: public schools in D.C. are at the bottom of national achievement rankings based on student performance. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading tests administered to District fourth- and eighth-graders, only 10 and 12 percent (respectively) scored at a proficient level and in math, a mere 6 percent of both fourth- and eighth-graders were proficient. Children in our nation’s capital deserve an escape route from these sinking ships.

This piece of legislation would authorize \$7 million for fiscal year 2004, \$8 million for fiscal year 2004, \$8 million for fiscal year 2005, and \$10 million each year for fiscal years 2006-2008. This funding would allow 8,300 tuition scholarships to be awarded to disadvantaged children over the first five years. I emphasize the fact that these funds are additional federal money and do not come out of the District’s public school budget.

Competition fosters and encourages academic excellence and is why our universities are the greatest in the world. On the contrary, our grammar and high school students lag behind those in other industrialized nations due to a lack of competition. I believe that the competition that choice provides has and will continue to motivate the public school system to do a better job across the board. We must not follow the path that accepts the status quo of failing D.C. schools. I hope my colleagues will take the path towards allowing disadvantaged students in our nation’s capital to have a bright academic future through school choice by supporting this vital piece of legislation.”

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